THE EYE:

BY OBADIAH OPTIC.

——*VARIOUS OBJECTS FROM THE SENSE,*
VARIOUSLY REPRESENTING. MILTON.

Vol. I.] *THURSDAY, JANUARY* 14, 1808. [No. 2.

——Persuades hoc tibi verè,
Ante potestatem Tulli, atque ignobile regnum,
Multos sæpe viros nullis majoribus ortos,
Et vixisse probos, amplis et honoribus auctos. HORACE.

IMITATED.

Before *America* had gain'd a name,
Or WASHINGTON had swell'd the list of fame,
One truth is sure, men gloried to be free,
And by their acts, not birth, made known their pedigree.

WHEN a periodical publication is offered to the world, the first question that naturally offers is, "Who is the author?" If it be found that he is a great man, celebrated for his talents, his connexions, his wealth, every one is anxious to become a subscriber, and pronounces that it must undoubtedly be a valuable production; but should it happen, as it often does, that the poor author is one whom nobody knows, the paper is coolly thrown aside, pronounced "*trash*," and never read.

To prevent my essays from being treated in this manner, (for I wish, of all things, to have a fair hearing) in this number I shall give my intelligent and curious readers some account of my family, that so, if possible, we may become acquainted, and go together hand in hand in our enquiries and disquisitions.

I trust I shall not be accused of vanity, when I declare, that the family of the OPTICS derive their origin from Adam: Should this be disputed, we have in our possession a vast number of oriental medals, old manuscripts and authentic documents from the pages of both sacred and profane history, which can effectually put to silence the most captious critic in the universe.—To our family also appertain all the honours

of the various inventions that have benefited mankind in all ages; and I publicly defy the most skilful genealogist, to produce a single individual who ever signalized himself by invention, who did not belong to our family.

It is true, two persons, who, by the bye, came into our family by the back door, have pretended to some inventions; but they have never been acknowledged as legitimate, nor have their inventions sanctioned their claim. The first of these is *Jacob Sceptic*, a smart, lively lad enough, but some how or other, by keeping bad company, unseasonable hours, and reading bad books, he convinced himself that there was no *reality* in any thing; that the world, the sun, moon, stars, himself, and every thing else, were nothing more than *ideas*; that nothing ought to be believed but just what *he saw*, and what he saw was only an idea.—He deduces his origin, it is true, from one of our family, in the time of the Babylonish captivity, a light-headed little girl, who was carried beyond the *strict* bounds of prudence, by a giddy follower of one of the eastern magi; for good reasons therefore, do we renounce any connexion with Jacob.

The other is *Thomas Lunatic*, who pretends to be one of our family also, but upon what ground I could never learn: He boasts indeed of his pretensions, and at *some seasons*, is truly very *flighty*, says he has documents and manuscripts and medals to prove his legitimacy, but as yet he has concealed them from the world. I cannot deny but he is of a very ancient family, and they have all been keenly engaged in projects and inventions; yet all their projects and inventions have proved that they were not of the family of the Optics, but true *Lunatics*; for example, for upwards of 2000 years they were all engaged in searching for an *universal menstrum* to turn all metals into gold—an *universal remedy* destructive of death—the *perpetual motion*, &c. &c. But their constant failure proved they were none of our family: Lately, a number of them have been engaged in spinning silk stockings, gloves, mitts, &c. out of spiders' webs; but Thomas has at last found that the cost out-runs the profits, and like an honest lunatic, has lain spider web stockings to rest along with the perpetual motion. But of all the inventions in which Tom has ever been concerned, none ever gave him so much credit, nor has been so much his hobby-horse, as *balloons*, these machines so well suited Tom's taste, studies and intelligence, that when

he performed his first æriel voyage, he determined immediately to go right to the moon, to know what she was made of, discourse with her inhabitants, and return in a few weeks, with a head full of knowledge: But, in the course of his experiments, he has met with so many adverse winds, stormy clouds, and such cold weather, that he is nearly resolved to lay up baloons with the rest of his great inventions.

All mankind must allow, that our family has always been remarkable for clear sightedness; but our enemies, for we have had our enemies as well as others, have always blamed us for being active in seeing and investigating the faults of other people, and slightly noticing our own; and to this accusation, I must, in name of a majority of my progenitors, plead guilty. Indeed, on examining myself, I find it an easy thing to blame others, and very hard to blame myself, and hence I judge: I know one of my progenitors a long time ago declared, that, "Know thyself," descended from Heaven, and that a much greater than he said, "First cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou wilt see clearly to take the mote out of thy brother's," yet all the examples we have seen, and all the advices we have received, have not been able effectually to eradicate the evil. It is therefore highly probable, that as I proceed I may overlook my own faults, whilst I endeavour to correct others, and what is still worse, pass slightly over virtues, whilst their defects are minutely observed; but should this be the case, my consolation is, the OPTICS are very numerous, and altho' all of one family, yet they never have been backward to shew vice its own image, tho' found in the person of the nearest relation. OBADIAH OPTIC.

ORIGINAL.

THE AMERICAN IDLER.—No. II.

By blast of *self* opinion mov'd,
We wish to charm, and seek to be belov'd. PRIOR.

IN looking over my first number, I could not help smiling at the frequent recurrence of the words, "*I*," "*my*," &c. through the course of it, because it brought to recollection the unguarded expression of Cardinal WOLSEY, *Ego et rex meus!* (*I*, and my king!) which ADDISON asserts, is the most violent egotism he ever met with.

That man, in whatever affair he engages, should consider the part he acts "*in propria persona*," as of the greatest consequence to himself, is not surprising or unnatural; but in speaking of it, policy and politeness dictate, that self should not appear the entire ascendant, as he cannot, or ought not to suppose, that disinterested persons will be as eager to listen, as he pleased to relate the particular features of his single exploits or conduct. But what policy requires or what propriety demands, are not always the leading incentives or prudent guides, which direct men in their actions, and as self is the prevailing passion, it generally happens, as with Cardinal WOLSEY, that *Ego et rex meus* ("*I*" "*myself*,") will appear to be the principal, if not the only person or thing that interests the mind.

When I apply to myself, as an author, what has been observed, I cannot but acknowledge that a portion of egotism was evident in the commencement of this work, sufficient to satisfy even the above named personage himself. But on looking back, I found that custom has long authorised periodical writers *at that time*, to speak with earnestness on whatever appertains to self, and to use every means to prejudice the reader in their favour; and indeed, reason dictates the necessity of their giving some sketch of their views, some account of the subjects they propose to consider or discuss, and some insight into their principles. But authors do not always stop here; they dwell on that beloved subject, in their *second*, nay even in their *third* and *fourth* numbers. As this has been the case with the wisest and best writers, my error of like nature, will admit of considerable palliation, and after indulging it in this number, I will divest the succeeding ones, as much as possible, of that uninteresting (to all but myself) topic.

That the world might know what kind of being I was, I had intended to have given, at this time, a history of the former part of my life, to point out my subsequent errors, to state my present situation and conduct, and to mention my resolves for the future: But the folly and futility of such a history was soon evident: No one that I know of, would be interested or benefited by a retrospective account of my former days, or impressed by my promises of better conduct for the future; for the most worthy seldom observe the good resolutions they form, but "*resolve and re-resolve*" without putting their determination into practice, and as I do not pretend

to rank myself higher than them, I shall not act more resolutely, or more judiciously.

The next thing that presents itself, is the necessity of deprecating every disadvantageous opinion which may be formed, on account of a want of originality, which many may discover in my essays. "Here," exclaims some one, "you have hit upon as disagreeable a subject as that of '*yourself*;' this is the cry of every modern writer; and though he asserts that his plagiarisms are involuntary, they are sometimes so palpable, that it is almost impossible to believe him." Thus I am left rather in an awkward dilemma, but as I conceive it absolutely necessary to say something on this head, I will go on.

There appears to me something so mean in the idea of substituting the thoughts of others for our own, and something so ridiculous in the hopes of gaining celebrity, from offering the works of those wiser than ourselves to the public, as the genuine productions of our brain, that I am surprised any should attempt it: Certain it is, that those who do so, discover neither good sense, nor good principle; and it is no less certain, that every endeavour to build our fame on such a foundation, will prove fruitless. Most persons who attempt to write, are sensible of this, and of course endeavour to avoid, as much as possible, every such imputation. And yet, authors will much sooner fall into this error now, than a century ago. The reason is obvious; since that period, the most elegant and ingenious writers have arose, who have gone over the fields of literature, reaped from them a rich harvest, and left no "*subject untried or unadorned.*" Hence it follows, that the man who has read much, in attempting to imitate those whom he admires, becomes only their copyists, and vexed and mortified when he discovers it, is afterwards dubious whether those thoughts and sentiments, which are really his own, are not the property of another; for, as SHERIDAN beautifully observes, "*faded ideas float in the brain like half forgotten dreams, and imagination, in its fullest enjoyments, becomes suspicious of its offspring, and doubts whether it has created or adopted.*"

I consider that these doubts and fears have a forcible tendency to damp the exertions of numbers in the cause of literature. Many who are well qualified to enlist under its banners, are rendered dubious of their powers by seeing the ill success of others not so capable, and therefore endeavour to smother those sparks of genius and mental fire which elevate and pro-

pel them. Others, who commence such a career, expect that some will admire, and some praise them, or that some bright thoughts and some happy expressions may be pointed out, to show their understanding, and exalt their genius. But if once an author is accused of plagiarism, and it can on any occasion be proved on him, the current of popular favour turns against him, and the prejudices that are excited are not easily to be overcome. His subsequent efforts may discover talents, and disclose much valuable information; and men of correct judgment may acknowledge their merit, but the majority will be slow in discovering in him that merit, which in another would be plain to the most superficial observer. His situation is precisely similar to that of a man who commits a bad action, which tarnishes his character in a moral sense, and who thus loses the confidence of mankind. Has he acted imprudently or criminally? Men too frequently conclude his nature is corrupted, and that nothing good can emanate from so polluted a source; and whatever may be his conduct for the future, if it is ever so exemplary or praiseworthy, constructions will be put upon it derogatory to his honour.—It is thus in literature; the man who is once caught thieving (if I may be allowed the term) from the works of others, forever destroys his reputation as an author.

After asserting sentiments, and expressing opinions of this nature, it must be evident to every one, that I shall not wilfully fall into a like error, and whether finally the stamp of folly, or the impression of wisdom, will be engraven on these essays, I leave for the decision of the world; determined not to be uneasy, or anxiously to look forward;—sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. J.

ORIGINAL.

THE SPECTACLES.—No. II.

——————————Animorum
Impulsu, et cæca magnaque cupidine ducti. JUV.

"Vain man runs headlong, to caprice resign'd;
Impell'd by passion, and with folly blind."

MR. OPTIC,

THE first number of these essays has, I suppose, been the cause of the communication which accompanies this; the writer appears candid in his disclosure, which seems to

have been dictated by commendable motives; he has touched upon the vices which are peculiarly incident to the learned professions, and lively depicted the vanity which his new situation inspired. Of all the evils to which literary characters are exposed, vanity is the most difficult to be avoided, it may justly be styled their "besetting sin," and requires the greatest fortitude to repel it; it is too often the case, that good sense resigns its place to pedantry, and genius is superseded by self-conceit; wisdom is regarded as an uniform concomitant of information, and is only a secondary object: Proud of what we acquire from others, we forget our dependence on their labours, and usher their offspring into the world with paternal pomp; we arrogate to ourselves all the merit, and consider the author of our knowledge only so far deserving that he has enabled us to shine with borrowed light. We expect admiration for our acquirements, and care not about the application of them: Our wisdom is judged of, more by our reading than our actions, and though we mingle with men as literary jackdaws, we flatter ourselves we cannot be detected in borrowed plumes. But it is now time to leave this digression, and submit the following letter to my readers; the facts contained in it, are concise and sarcastic; the narration simple, and I trust, not unentertaining. T.

MR. SPECTACLES,

If an account of a small part of my life can afford you amusement, or give your readers satisfaction, it will fully compensate for the renewal of my grief while I detail my errors: That others may profit by my experience, rather than their own, I am induced to hope you will give this recital a place in one of your numbers.

After I had completed an academical education, the choice of a suitable profession occupied the attention of my parents: One of the learned professions I certainly must belong to, but which was preferable, in every point of view, remained for determination. The advantages of the pulpit were first discussed, as its dignity merited the chief consideration; but a divine was not looked upon as an eligible character, because, from the nature of his situation, he was deprived of many of the rational and innocent recreations of life. The science of physic commanded more deliberation before it was rejected; and, finally it was concluded, my feelings were too sympathetic, and my nerves entirely unfit for the execution of those

duties which might devolve upon me.—But after mature consultation and repeated reviews of the subject, it was thought the study of the law was liable to none of these objections; on the contrary, it seemed a delightful and easy path to wealth and honour; they were further led to adopt this choice, as they informed me, because my genius seemed to them to be particularly inclined to eminence in that profession, and my happy gift of loquacity could be contented in no other situation. When the result of their conferences was submited to my approbation, elated with the notion, their decision was immediately approved and acquiesced in. I considered the law as the high road to fame, and the avenue to all honourable offices of trust and profit: Anticipating the respect which would be attached to my new character, I impatiently waited to assume the title of *student at law*. An eminent practitioner was chosen, under whose care and instruction I was to proceed in my new career: I entered his office with all the pleasure an honourable and novel situation excites, and delighted to contemplate on the encouraging prospects before me; the allotted time for my apprenticeship, (three years) I considered as wisely provided for the dullest capacities, and therefore calculated upon having a considerable portion to devote to pleasure; after a tedious and laborious confinement at college, I viewed this study rather as a relaxation, than a fresh scene of toil: I read at times; and as I had heard of this study being dry and difficult, always attributed to my superiour comprehension what belonged to the simplicity of the writer; when I wished to enjoy myself in other pursuits, I was consoled for lost time by the reflection, that when necessity called for my professional talents, I could refer to those copious indexes with which law books abound, and readily learn in that way, with ease, what others acquired with pain; and another convincing argument was my resort when pleasure invited, and I never failed to profit by this sophism, a day or two are nothing out of three years, by assiduity all may be repaired: Thus I went on at my ease, hurrying through one book after another, and thought myself fast attaining the summit of legal excellence. I now began to entertain a consciousness of my superiority over others, and entered company with that consequence which was, in my opinion, the prerogative of him who devoted his hours to the pursuit of literature. I could perceive a change in the con-

duct of those who were my former associates, but construed their disgust into a decent respect for my talents, and supposed myself an agreeable superiour; when I condescended to any familiarity, I seized upon every opportunity of showing my knowledge, and my vanity converted universal contempt into admiration; true, my arrogance did not always escape mortification, but then I attributed it all to envy: In this disposition, and in that manner, did I read, some part of my time, in order to qualify myself for admission to the bar: I measured my progress by the pages passed over, and not the information received: I did not arrest my attention, to impress on my memory any thing perused, but postponed the attainment, confidently expecting to meet with it at a time when I was more inclined to encounter difficulties; and if any thing appeared obscure, I fondly hoped, in some succeeding author, an explanation would present itself, and gave myself no concern about it. At length the period of my admission was approaching, apparently long at first, but now arriving too soon for me; upon reviewing the employment of my time, I now found the hours considered as superfluous, amounted to the greater part of my time, and what I had read produced no essential benefit; in short, I discovered I knew little or nothing: Those books which had been looked through would have been unknown, had not their titles risen up as witnesses of my folly. But it was too late for lamentation, the impending examination was a terror, and at length delayed a considerable time, because I was unfit to undergo it. The three years, I now found, when properly spent, little enough for the brightest genius, and was convinced that reading was a labour assuaged by custom and lightened by application.

Your's, SOPHRON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE EYE.

FRIEND OPTIC,

I HAVE observed, with much satisfaction, the first opening of thine eye upon this blinking squinting world of ours: It appears comely and shrinks not from the glare of day; yet, permit one who has seen a considerable deal of the world, to give thee a word in, what he deems, good season.

Thou hast opened thine eye upon evil times; false lights are abroad, and so great is the glare occasioned by meteorological philosophers, theoretical skyrockets, and the squibs and crackers of the striplings of the age, that the sun of vir-

tue will be, at times, almost dim to thy sight; but be not disheartened; turn not from the path which thou hast marked out; let thine eye be stedfast as the eye of the hero who panteth for the battle; and the more thou observest the bright beams of the great luminary of virtue, thine eye will become strengthened, and the less occasion wilt thou have for the eye water that thou wilt have offered to thee by the quacks of the day.

Thou wilt find, that though there are many hard places in this city, even hard and solid as a millstone, yet there are many soft, yea, very soft; they are quag-mires, and from these quag-mires arise mists that will be hurtful to thy sight, and darken thy prospects; beware of them, their mists may occasion a film that will render an operation upon thine eye necessary, and lay it open to the sharp instruments of the professors (of which there are many in this city) and cause thee to lose the apple thereof. Furthermore, an ignis-fatuus may at times arise from them, that will mislead those that thou holdest most dear in thy sight; therefore, keep aloof from them.

Thou wilt also be troubled with gnats, of which there is a numerous tribe; they will come around thee with much seeming good humour, and endeavour to buz themselves into a corner of thine eye; but with thine eye lashes scourge them away, for should they get in, thine eye will more resemble the red fiery sun setting behind the whirling clouds of an August tempest, than the bright luminary of day, "bursting from the chambers of the east" to "make glad the hills" and chace the noxious vapours from the vallies of this favoured country. Let thine eye also be turned into the private alleys, as well as the public walks of vice; search them out, let its lustre, while it drys up the sinks of iniquity, lighten up the cottage of virtue. That thou mayest retain thy sight perfect to a good old age, is the sincere wish of thy friend EPHRAIM.

1st. mo. 9th.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

"*The Mushroom*" – Light food for literary epicures, shall augment our bill of fare next week.

"*Pursuits of Dullness*"—exemplified in the essay.

Several communications received shall be disposed of according to their merits.

Poetical Department.

ORIGINAL.

AFFECTION'S SMILE.

On reading in Mrs. OPIE's Poems, that strikingly beautiful line,

"The smile of affection is riches to me."

ADDRESSED TO EMMA.

LET others prize the balmy kiss,
Which sorrow can beguile;
My greatest wealth, my greatest bliss,
Is fond affection's smile.

The cheeks may dimpled charms display,
The lips be dress'd by art;
But ah! the joy that they convey,
Entrances not the heart:

While, by affection's smile benign,
Extatic bliss is giv'n,
The eyes beam forth the soul divine
And promise future heav'n!

E'en now, heav'n shines in EMMA's face;
Affection's smile is there;
And glows with loveliness and grace,
And truth beyond compare.

These, dearest EMMA! may I prove,
Till I this world resign;
And then sublim'd, in bliss above
Affection's smile divine.

EDWIN.

ORIGINAL.

SHE WHO WOU'D GAIN, &c.

A NEW SONG,

Adapted to I FISIN's music of "*Straying beside yon wood screen'd river, &c.*"

SHE, who wou'd gain a worthy lover,
A lasting empire, and fair fame,
Shou'd always study to discover
The conquest of the mind her aim.

For this must kindred graces join,
And in her bosom fix their throne—
Truth, *Virtue*, *Innocence* divine,
Whose pow'r and sway all feel and own.

Tho' she have riches beyond measure,
And beauty's most enchanting form,—
Love never will be bought by *treasure*,
Nor fetter'd long by *Beauty's* charm:
Truth, *Virtue*, *Innocence* divine,
Alone can win, and firm can bind;
By them, with magic tie benign,
Mind is forever join'd with mind.

When such the union, bliss improving,
Bears up beyond this troubled state;
They, each by each belov'd and loving,
Feel not the adverse strokes of fate:
And when the happy hour shall come
To wing their wedded spirits hence,
The convoys to their native home
Are....*Virtue*, *Truth* and *Innocence*. EDWIN.

ORIGINAL.

TO ANNA,

WITH A GOLD (KEY) BREAST PIN.

WITH faltering tongue shall EDWARD dare
Presumptuously be bold,
To ask if ANNA, lovely fair,
Will wear this key of gold?

Will ANNA deign this pledge to wear,
To close the kerchief thin,
And guard like Eden's sword with care
The paradise within?

Yet may it not *each* av'nue close
That leads to ANNA's breast,
But EDWARD there find calm repose,
And lull his cares to rest. EDWARD.

PUBLISHED BY J. W. SCOTT, NO. 147 CHESNUT-STREET, PHIL'A.